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### **Higher Education Makes Case For Funding**

Improving educational attainment is vital to any state's effort to enhance the quality of life of its citizens and strengthen economic competitiveness. That was the message delivered yesterday by Commissioner of Higher Education Joseph Savoie to the House Appropriations Committee, which is considering House Bill 1, the state's general appropriations bill for the upcoming fiscal year.

"Our economy - state, national and worldwide - is quickly moving from being based on strong backs to one based on strong minds," Savoie told the committee. "To be competitive and to create the conditions for strong economic growth, Louisiana needs to help all of its residents increase their skills and be prepared to pursue postsecondary learning opportunities. Education is the most effective path to economic stability."

Savoie made his case for funding priority for postsecondary education to members of a legislature facing an estimated \$340 million overall budget shortfall compared to last year. The administration's proposed budget for postsecondary education falls short of the total requested by Savoie and the Louisiana Board of Regents, which maintains policy and financial oversight of Louisiana's college and university systems. While the proposed budget technically represents a slight increase over last year's appropriation, it calls for some \$40 million in mandated increases in employee insurance costs, salary merit increases and retirement increases to be absorbed by the systems, which amounts to an effective \$40 million decrease in funding compared to last fiscal year.

Savoie said that while he and the postsecondary education community understand that the state's public colleges and universities will have to bear at least some of the impact of the state's projected budget shortfall, there is a danger that much of the state's postsecondary education reform progress made in recent years could be reversed. Louisiana postsecondary education has undergone significant reforms in recent years. These nationally-recognized reforms were made possible in large part by an administration and legislature which expressed their belief in the relationship between educational excellence and economic development through yearly increases in funding, among the most significant in the nation.

(More)

## Higher Education Funding

### ADD ONE

“I won’t kid you; a \$40 million cut will have a significant impact, not just on new initiatives, but on existing programs and facilities,” Savoie said in response to a question from a committee member as to how such a cut would be distributed among campuses and programs.

Savoie was also questioned by the committee on the progress of the Board of Regents Master Plan for Public Postsecondary Education, the document which has served as the blueprint for most of the recent successful postsecondary education reform efforts. A critical component of the Master Plan is the implementation of minimum admission requirements for the state’s four-year universities, which will go into effect by the fall of 2005 at most public university campuses. One committee member expressed concern over the hardship the new standards could cause for students who might not meet the requirements for enrollment at the institution of their choice.

“The Master Plan, and the admissions standards, are based on the principle of ‘access for success,’” Savoie said. “It’s not enough to provide *access* to postsecondary education; the standards are designed to help ensure that our students are prepared to be successful once they are admitted. The *hardship* that we are trying to address is the hardship experienced by students who go to college for a year or two, pay tuition, buy books, incur loan debt and then flunk out, become disillusioned and have their lives sidetracked because they weren’t prepared for college. The bottom line is that, with the LCTCS firmly in place, we now have a system entry point for everyone who desires to advance his or her education beyond high school, and we believe those entry points offer the best chance for success, no matter how far a student intends to advance in the system.”

Savoie also emphasized that the new admission standards will allow the state’s four-year universities to focus more effectively on their individual missions, and help ensure that students are matched to the institutions where they can be successful.

Commissioner Savoie’s presentation was followed by supporting presentations from the state’s four postsecondary education systems: the University of Louisiana System, the LSU System, the Southern University System, and the Louisiana Community and Technical Colleges System.